

State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Testimony of
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Executive Director
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Select Committee on Children
Tuesday, February 15, 2005

Re:

P. B. 897, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Child Poverty Council
P.B. 5482, An Act Concerning the Implementation of the Recommendations of the
Child Poverty Council

Good afternoon Sen. Meyer, Rep. Cardin and members of the committee. My name is Leslie Gabel-Brett and I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of proposed bills 897 and 5482, requiring the implementation of the recommendations of the Child Poverty Council.

The goal of the Child Poverty Council that was established by statute – to reduce the rate of child poverty in our state by fifty percent in ten years – is one of the most important for our state government to achieve. We believe the work of the Child Poverty Council was thoughtful and productive. We may not agree with every decision made by the Council as to priorities and recommendations, but we believe the report and recommendations are a very good start. A further mandate must be included in our statutes so that all the good thinking and learning that took place can be transformed into concrete action and will not be wasted.

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is very interested in the work of the Child Poverty Council because the majority of people living in poverty in our state are mothers and their children. If there is one message we want to deliver clearly it is that *children are poor because their parents are poor*. And their parents are poor more

often than not because they lack the skills and infrastructure around them to get and keep a job that leads to economic self-sufficiency. By skills, we mean adequate literacy and math proficiency and a specific job skill that leads to decent employment. By “infrastructure,” we mean the work supports that are necessary to make a low to moderate wage job lead to economic security – affordable childcare, secure health care, transportation. Having a decent place to live at a reasonable price is also essential.

We support the very first recommendation of the Child Poverty Council, which is to support and enhance job training and education for recipients of Temporary Family Assistance. As you may know, nearly half the people currently receiving TANF benefits in our time-limited program do not have a high school diploma. Yet without a high school diploma, it is nearly impossible to secure a job. If we want to unlock the door for these parents and their children, we must invest in basic adult education for them, including English as a Second Language, and skill training in occupations that lead to higher wage employment. In order for adult education to be successful, it must be provided at the right times and places for adult learners, and it should be tied to occupational opportunities.

The link between education and training and economic success is clear. The Center for Law and Social Policy released a report entitled *Built to Last: Why Skills Matter for Long-Run Success in Welfare Reform*¹ in which they summarize the results of numerous national studies and Census data that demonstrate the link. For example, one national study of welfare recipients found that each year of schooling beyond high school increased wages by about 7 percent.² Census data from 1999 show that women with an associate degree earn more than twice as much as those without a high school diploma (about \$24,000 annually compared to about \$11,000) and 37 percent more than those with only a high school diploma (who earn about \$17,000).³

The Council also voted to recommend the creation of a refundable state Earned Income Tax Credit. We support this recommendation as one of the most effective policies for lifting low-income working families out of poverty. Our nation and our state have a rich history of adjusting tax policy in order to promote a common good. Two of the most well-known such tax policies are the home mortgage tax deduction, enacted to help families enter the middle class by purchasing a home, and the tax deduction for charitable giving. If tax policies are good medicine for the middle class, why should they be off-limits for low-income families? The goal of ameliorating child poverty is as urgent and socially significant as the goals of these other tax policies. The federal EITC has had bi-partisan support since its inception. We urge you to support this recommendation.

¹ Karin Martinson and Julie Strawn, Center for Law and Social Policy, April, 2003.

² *Ibid.*, citing Corcoran, M., & Loeb, S. (2001) Welfare, work experience, and economic self-sufficiency. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 20(1); see also Kane, T. J., & Rouse, C. E. (1995, June) Labor market returns to two and four year college. *American Economic Review*.

³ *Ibid.*, citing U.S. Census Bureau. (2000, December). Table 9: Earnings in 1999 by educational attainment for people over 18 years old and over, by age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin: March 2000. Washington, DC: Data cited is for females between the ages of 25 and 64, with earnings.

We know a great deal about what it takes to reduce poverty, and the process of fact-finding and deliberation undertaken by the Child Poverty Council helped to focus our understanding. Now we need the political will and the mandate to begin the journey. We need to build a ladder with sturdy rungs so that people can climb up it to economic security. People need the basic skills to get a decent job, and affordable supports such as childcare, health care, transportation and housing so that a decent job can become a decent way of life. When families can make a decent living, we will achieve the important goal of reducing child poverty. Thank you.

